

Three Count®

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WCW begins "smart" newsletter; wrestling journalists slammed in inaugural issue

World Championship Wrestling has begun production of *Late Breaking News*, an attempt at a "smart" newsletter that is being sold at live WCW matches.

Written by WCW photographer **Dennis Brent**, The inaugural issue of LBN in its new format (10 issues were printed previously, but were written in a format not to expose any "inside" wrestling news). The headline to the lead story read "Wrestling 'Journalists' Taken In By Scheme." The story details WCW's version of the firing of **Paul E. Dangerously** in October.

As a writer for *The Miami Herald*, I explained in two news stories what I had heard from Dangerously, his attorney, **Bruce Gold**, **Eddie Gilbert** (who Dangerously reportedly leaked the information to) and sources at WCW. I reported Dangerously had been fired over leaking news about a possible WCW/United States Wrestling Association merger, with quotes from Dangerously and Gold. When Dangerously was rehired, I spoke with him and WCW to confirm my story.

I cannot vouch for other wrestling reporters, except I do know **Dave Meltzer's Wrestling Observer Newsletter** had much the same information I did (because the firing wasn't one of wrestling's great secrets), **Wade Keller's Pro Wrestling Torch** had quotes from long-time USWA main-eventer **Jerry Lawler** and **Gilbert** on the subject, and *Matwatch's* **Steve Beverly** had quotes from USWA owner **Jerry Jarrett**. **Gilbert** also appeared on **John Arrezi's Pro Wrestling Spotlight** radio show and spoke about the incident (along with offering some choice comments on WCW executive vice president **Jim Herd** and announcer **Jim Ross**).

Since Brent's newsletter appears to be aimed at myself and the aforementioned newsletter writers, I figured I should break down some of the more interesting quotes in his article and reply (I did not bother correcting the incorrect grammar and punctuation inside Brent's story).

- "Without talking directly to either **Paul E. Dangerously** or **Jim Herd**, (Wrestling journalists and editors) listened to questionable third-party sources that were telling them what they wanted to hear and were championing what they thought was **Paul E. Dangerously's** clause, not realizing that they weren't really helping them at all."

For the record, I spoke with **Dangerously** throughout the situation, even though he declined to answer some questions and referred me to **Gold** for others. **Herd** will not speak with me despite repeated attempts to reach him. Nor will WCW president **Jack Petrick**.

- "(These editors) thought there was no way in the world WCW could get **Rick Rude** or that **Paul** could get back in WCW. They had been calling each other for months now, hypothesizing the future moves of WCW and more recently **Paul E. Dangerously**. But none of them was even close, nor do they still have a clue. But that's what free press is for, and any one could have an opinion, as long as they label it as such. When an opinion is stated as news, it can often times be construed as slander, according to **Paul E.'s** advisors. And when they campaign against somebody and start calling for someone's job, they better have their facts straight, or it might be libel, according to one source close to **Dangerously**."

Hypothesizing the future moves of WCW has not been difficult, nor is the speculation limited to the past few months. The referral to "someone's job" is that of **Herd**, who has been under attack by some "smart" wrestling fans for the past few years. Interestingly enough, my articles in *The Herald* have always been columns, and not straight news stories. When I do write a straight news story, as was the case with **Dangerously's** firing, I try to confirm the story with as many sources as possible. Since WCW publicist **Barry Norman** was the only WCW employee who would speak with me, **Herd** did not exercise his right to state WCW's side of the story, which I would have been glad to print.

When I first read Brent's story, I grew angry. But the feeling quickly subsided as I thought more about the background of **Brent**. During the summer on his WCW hotline number, **Brent** reported WCW would implement anabolic steroid testing for its wrestlers. The report was untrue, with **Brent** making the comment because he "wanted to see it happen," according to a source very close to the situation. **Brent**, and the WCW offices, would apparently rather spend their time trying to rebuke reports from newsletter writers, almost all of which are true, than boost their house shows. This whole situation

has me more convinced than ever that if more wrestling fans were knowledgeable as to how the wrestling business works, the better it would become. I wonder why Brent doesn't spend more time trying to distribute photographs to newspapers in the towns WCW runs in than waste time on this nonsense.

The newsletter also had some other "interesting" information that has reportedly infuriated some WCW performers. Under a section called "Wrestlers Fined," Brent reported **The Diamond Studd** (Scott Hall) was fined \$500 for trying to sneak a young lady into his dressing room in Greensboro, and **Tommy Rich** was fined \$250 for bringing two six-packs to the matches in Phoenix. "He said they were for the ring crew," Brent wrote. That last comment is actually witty, considering the ring crew never showed up at WCW's show in Phoenix this summer, causing the card's cancellation. However, Studd is married and Rich is trying to clean up his reputation after an August arrest for marijuana possession. Those comments do not help those wrestler's standings in the company.

Brent also had a section called "Who is the real world champion?" that said Lex Luger was the only real world champion. "Even Hogan is not called the World Champion," writes Brent, who never referred to "Hogan's" first name in the article. Ric Flair's and Jerry Lawler's names were also mentioned in the two-paragraph section.

Finally, in the letter's section, Brent had a letter from "Eddie Keller" in Minneapolis, saying he hopes Dangerously never returns to WCW. There was also letters from **Dave Hudson** of Atlanta (Global Wrestling Federation announcer **Scott Hudson** lives in nearby Hudson, Ga.) and **Bill and Debbie Marks** from Syracuse. Actually, I'm really looking forward to attending WCW's Jan. 16 show in Jacksonville just to get another program for a letter from **Alex Meltzer** of San Jose, Calif.

World Championship Wrestling

Dave Meltzer was nice enough to give me the lineup for WCW's Jan. 21 Clash of Champions show from Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Missouri. The co-main events are **Sting** and **Ricky Steamboat** against **Steve Austin** and **Rick Rude** and a six-man tag between **Barry Windham-Ron Simmons-Dustin Rhodes** vs. **Larry Zbyszko-Arn Anderson-Bobby Eaton**. The undercard has **Van Hammer** vs. **Cactus Jack** with falls counting anywhere in the building, **The Steiner brothers** vs. **Big Van Vader** and **Mr. Hughes, P.N. News** vs. **Diamond Dallas Page** (viewer's discretion is advised), **Johnny B. Badd** vs. **Ricky Morton**, **The Young Pistols** and **The Diamond Studd** vs. **The Patriots-Flyin' Brian Pillman**

and **Terrence Taylor** vs. **Thomas Rich**. With only eight matches on the show, each will have the chance to develop effectively. But beware, because WCW could always try to clutter up the show with more matches. The thing I don't like about the show is no apparent help in building up the **Lex Luger-Sting** match that will headline **SuperBrawl '92** Feb. 23 from the Milwaukee Arena (the show was moved from the Taj Mahal in New Jersey, and attempts to land the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas proved unsuccessful). **Rude** will wrestle **Steamboat** at **Superbrawl**, so expect **Steamboat** to gain a pinfall in that match.

From what I understand, **Luger** is not booked for any house shows in January, which will not help business. I really expect WCW to let **Luger** go in March when the option year of his contract comes up (as does **Luger's** \$700,000 salary). **Luger** means nothing in WCW's mix of talent, and the money could probably be used better elsewhere. Headlining the January shows are **Sting** vs. **Rude**, which should do awful business. Word is there are less house shows booked the first few months of 1992, but that could change ... While many WCW wrestlers (and not the talented ones) appear in Tokyo January 4 for a combined super-show with New Japan Pro Wrestling, the remaining talent will embark on a mini-tour of Alabama. Headlining shows will be **Van Hammer** vs. **Cactus Jack**, which means gates in the range of \$3,000-\$4,000 ... Advance gates are slightly up for WCW shows the last week of December, with **Starrcade '91** in Norfolk having sold \$50,000 worth of tickets already. WCW needs to draw a gate of about \$80,000 to keep running the **Meadowlands** in New Jersey, but only \$22,000 in advance sales were registered about a week before the show.

Starrcade takes place at 7 p.m. Sunday, and here's an updated list of entrants. Expect every WCW wrestler to be involved, along with **Jushin Liger** and **Buddy Lee Parker** of **The State Patrol**. **Liger** won the WCW light heavyweight title from **Pillman** Dec. 25 at the **Omni**. **The Diamond Studd** has been yanked from the show because he had surgery to remove two bone chips from his right elbow after returning from WCW's tour of England. He will be out eight weeks, and is doubtful for the January Clash. ... Also on the England trip, **P.N. News** and **Rude** got into a legitimate brawl. **Rude** pinned **News** in an arm wrestling match at a bar, first with one hand -- then two. Things then got heated between the two, which resulted in **Rude** (a former champion boxer and arm wrestler) knocking down **News** with one punch that gave the **Rapmaster** a black eye. **News'** injury was worked into an angle, as **Mr. Hughes** ran **News'** into the ringpost at a recent television taping to account for the injury.

Spotlight on: "Superstar" Billy Graham

He was the role model for which many of today's top wrestling stars have based their physiques. Yet Billy Graham is a model example of what long-term anabolic steroid use can do to the human body.

Graham, 48, has suffered avascular necrosis -- the deterioration of the body's joints -- because of long-term steroid abuse. His hip was replaced in 1986, and he had his ankle fused in 1990. Graham is also facing surgery on his other hip and knee as well.

Graham has become one of wrestling's leading advocates against steroids, and is planning to file a lawsuit against World Wrestling Federation owner Vince McMahon and Dr. George T. Zahorian, a Pennsylvania osteopath convicted last July on eight counts of illegal steroid distribution to pro wrestlers. Graham has also filmed a segment for the January 3 Inside Edition show, in which Graham is expected to talk about claims of previous steroid use by WWF champion Hulk Hogan (who denies the charge). Because of the show date and an agreement Graham reached with Inside Edition, most excerpts of his discussion of Hogan and the steroid issue will be covered in the next issue. In this, the first of a two-part interview, Graham discusses some of the aspects of the wrestling business he usually isn't asked too much about.

AM: With the increased attention anabolic steroid use in professional wrestling has received within the past few months, there have been increased discussions about government agencies regulating pro wrestling. How do you feel about wrestling commissions, and what has your previous involvement been with them?

BG: I think it is especially important to have them with the steroid issue gaining so much attention. I obviously do not trust (WWF owner) Vince McMahon to give the true and honest results of his testing. He may throw a few sacrificial lambs to show someone testing positive, but you can't make me believe that if Hulk Hogan or a couple of other main stars tested positive that he would suspend Hulk. But when I wrestled, we had an athletic commission that never seemed to have done anything for the wrestlers involved. Why pay a fee for a license when saw it was going for nothing in return. If the agency did something, like in an outside enforcement capacity, it would be totally different.

AM: How were the commissions concerning medical examinations?

BG: All the states with athletic commissions were supposed to have doctors representing the commission at the matches to examine you. Some doctors were much looser about the exams than others. Some would actually give a good listen to your heart and blood pressure. But most threw a blood pressure cup on your arm, and if the reading was halfway close to normal, they would let you wrestle. They would never ask your weight or about internal injuries or the medication you were taking.

AM: Had there been better doctors in your day, would some of your health problems been avoided?

BG: My heart rate and blood pressure were pretty well normal throughout my steroid use, as big and heavy as I was. It never triggered in me, but it could have had an effect in the guy sitting next to me. It's hard to say. A thorough exam could not have been given at a wres-

ting arena prior to a match anyway. While George Zahorian sold me all those steroids, he should have been running tests on me and monitoring me. He did none of that what so ever. Occasionally, he would perform a token blood pressure check, but he would never ask any questions about whether I was experiencing any side effects or tell me things to look for. There was no concern for me and no in-depth medical examination by him ever. He was the worst.

AM: Some people describe Zahorian as awestruck by hanging around the wrestlers.

BG: He loved being around wrestlers and in the limelight. When we were in Allentown for a show, he would walk back and forth from the ring to the locker room about 11 times to make sure everyone had seen him. He did have an egotistical involvement with wrestling.

AM: Are you still planning to sue Zahorian and the WWF?

BG: Yes, I'm going to sue, even though the wheels are turning kind of slowly right now. I plan on taking this as far as my lawyers want to go. I haven't spoken with them in some time. A new attorney has taken over the drug manufacturer's end of the lawsuit.

AM: Did you ever think your case would grow to the magnitude it has?

BG: Never. No one realized the potential of this. I didn't until I was injured, especially until after my ankle went out. That was the one that finally put me down. After the hip transplant, I continued to wrestle. But when my ankles went out, that was the final blow and the thing that woke me up. I had no idea it was going to boomerang this much. This, combined with the Zahorian incident and the Lyle Alzado stuff, became totally staggering. I never thought it would reach this magnitude.

AM: When and why did you decide to go public originally?

BG: It happened in March of 1990. I was laying

in a hospital bed after having an operation to fuse my right ankle, making it an inch shorter than my other leg. It was such a traumatic operation that I said I couldn't let it happen to other people. I thought maybe I could save some wrestlers from future injuries like the ones I have. I took a lot of heat from other wrestlers, but I felt it was more important to show the dangers and hazards of steroids, because I can offer a first-hand story of how it impacted my life.

AM: Who were the friends that stuck by you throughout your ordeal?

BG: As far as wrestlers go, John Studd was a very big supporter of mine. He came to visit me while I was in my cast, and has remained close. Jesse Ventura has remained loyal to me. Terry Funk has become a close friend in recent months.

AM: What is your friendship with Terry like?

BG: It's interesting. He's out here shooting a TV series, and we only live two minutes apart. We work out at the same gym together, and we saw each other as we started coming around. He wanted to know how my

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-- Billy Graham

steroid problems were. Even though we had met on the road, we never had time to become friends. I worked mostly in the Northeast and Florida, and he worked elsewhere. Even though we crossed paths, our friendship wasn't developed then. I was surprised to find out about his interest in steroids and his concern about the health of today's young people. When we get together, we talk about the good old days, the new days and the days in between.

AM: What is your fondest in-ring memory?

BG: I really remember the big matches, like when I was in Madison Square Garden or when I was selling out the Spectrum with Bruno Sammartino and setting the attendance record. I found things like that gratifying. Also, what really made it gratifying was the way we protected the business in the late 1970s. It was so much more protective then. The business has been

totally exposed now. McMahon has overexposed the product with a carnival atmosphere and ruined it. It's too bad, because I felt it was going along pretty well myself. It's actually gotten to the point I was embarrassed to be associated with it.

AM: How about from a wrestling standpoint?

BG: From a working standpoint, I was never a great worker. I was more of a showman, with a flamboyant personality, and I sold my appearance and personality. I wouldn't consider myself a good worker. I was average, but my gimmick is what carried me. I didn't have fantastic matches. I had just generated so much heat because of my interviews, persona and charisma that it really carried me. That as opposed to a Dory or Terry Funk performance. They're great technicians, and I don't fall into that category. But from a fan reaction standpoint -- which is how I judge my favorite matches -- I say I got a perfect 10 on some of those matches with Bruno, after defeating him in Baltimore and working the return matches. My wife said not to forget about my series with Dusty Rhodes, either.

AM: How about your most unique match?

BG: I was involved in a riot in a match in 1972 where I had help remove the wrestlers from the ring. It was in Las Vegas when Rocky Johnson wrestled Paul DeMarco, who was managed by Ken Ramsey, at the Convention Center. The fans tore up the pipes and busted the windows. The police had to bring out the dogs. It was all over the finish, which didn't go Johnson's way. There were a lot of blacks, mostly because of the waiters and bus boys who were working in the service industry. The fans robbed the cashiers, and were mugging people while adults with kids huddled in the bathrooms. The next time we ran the town three months later, the house went from \$40,000 to \$1,900.

AM: What do you remember about the Florida territory?

BG: I met my wife in Florida in 1977, which was wonderful. But it was kind of an unpleasant experience wrestling there, as you know, because the demand for blood was quite insatiable with Dusty being booker. I enjoyed it, but nothing could compare to working Boston and the Spectrum. That was the ultimate.

AM: What was it like wrestling in California, where you broke in?

BG: California was fantastic, because there was almost no traveling involved. You lived right near all the towns we used to work. Everyone was envious, because it was the place to be for the weather and the California lifestyle. Plus, wherever you worked, you could be in bed by 11:30 p.m. or midnight.

AM: For a while in the late 1970s, you dropped completely out of sight from pro wrestling. Where were you, and what did you do?

BG: I went to Arizona after I dropped the

(WWWF) strap to **Bob Backlund**. I got job burnout and reclused in the desert. It was good, but looking back, I wish I wouldn't have taken so much time off. I wish I would have stayed in there, but I needed to get out. I was tired of the road.

AM: Many people thought you were dead.

BG: (Long-time Houston promoter) **Paul Bosch** rang the bell in memory of me 10 times in Houston because he thought I was dead. There were people who were supposedly my pall bearers. **Gorilla Monsoon** wrote an article in *The Philadelphia Enquirer* saying that I had in fact passed away. When I found out, I called him and told him he needed to write a retraction. He asked me why. I told him because he was talking to me, meaning it couldn't be true. He said he called *The Arizona Republic* and asked if they knew of me. They said yes. Then Gorilla asked if they had seen me lately. They said no. He did the same thing with *The Scottsdale News*, and got the same answers. Gorilla told me, "That was good enough for me." There's journalism for ya'.

AM: What are your memories of McMahon when he was younger?

BG: I clearly remember talking to him one day during television tapings in Philadelphia back in about 1976. I asked him when all of this would be his, meaning the whole country. I kind of prophesized what he did. I knew he had the ambition. Once his father passed him the baton, I knew he would open up wrestling to what it is today. He just smiled and said he didn't know when it would happen, but it would. He had visions of promoting nationally then, but his father kept restraints on him.

Personality-wise, he was fine. I think he treated me as good as anyone ever did, because he was mesmerized by my physique and my large arms. To be quiet honest, he was a likeable person then, because he didn't have any power. I know Bruno used to have fits with McMahon for years. I don't know why, but I think it started when Vince suggested a finish to one of Bruno's matches, which you don't do to Bruno. I'm sure it goes deeper than that. McMahon seemed to genuinely be impressed with my physical attributes. He told me in 1985, when I went back up there to prepare for my return, that the only problem in wrestling I had was that I was well ahead of my time. I tried to tell him, "Well, I'm not ahead of time any longer. I'm here now."

AM: How has McMahon changed?

BG: He became strictly money-hungry and always longing for even more power and control. From some books I have read, some people, even when they have enough money, need to have more power. It appears that way with McMahon, because of his low esteem of wrestlers. He enjoys what he is doing. What he has done is run the whole country out of business and monopolized it. He is a power mogul. However, I

believe that this issue with the lies Hogan has tried to perpetrate on this country that McMahon is in trouble. I don't think it will run him out of business, but it will hurt their business. Bruno told me his sources in New York say 60 Minutes is preparing to do a story on wrestling and steroids. Remember -- Babylon fell and Rome fell.

AM: How was your 1985 return?

BG: When I first returned in 1985, my hip was gone. At my first performance in Baltimore, my hip went out. The next day, we both decided I was going to need a hip operation. McMahon told me, "OK, let's figure out how we can make money off this." He said he would pay for the operation, but when I started wrestling again, I would pay it off in installments. The operation ended up being \$25,000 in hospital bills and \$5,000 in doctor bills. So when I did go back on the road, I wasn't making that much because of the deductions. I thought it was kind of cruel to actually use my hip injury for an angle and make me pay to be in it.

AM: How did you finally depart Titan Sports?

BG: Vince told me in 1985 that no matter what happened, I would have a job for life. He said when I was through wrestling, there would always be a job available. He told my wife, Valerie, that when I came out of surgery. Needless to say, in October 1986, I could not wrestle anymore. My hip was fine, but my ankle prevented me from working. That also ended my managing career, as I couldn't get in and out of the ring to perform my duties to their expected level. Vince said he felt I should move to commentary. And I felt I had a great future ahead, because I felt I could carry my personality over into a commentator's berth.

AM: That wasn't exactly the most successful of stints, was it?

BG: Everybody had problems in the beginning doing commentary. Even Jesse had problems when he was first beginning. When I was co-commentating on Summer Slam in 1988, I received tremendous adulation from my peers. I saw it as a good breakthrough. But then in late 1988 or early 1989, I received a call from Vince saying they were changing TV production and tapings, and weren't going to use as much commentary as before. But he told me I was still in the bullpen, because I was family. The problem is being in the bullpen doesn't pay very well. I guess that gave Vince the right to call me back at any given time, even though I was not getting paid. I thought since I had done so much for the company, being the mold for Hogan and contributing to the WWF since 1975, I could at least be offered a road agent position. But I wasn't, and I was a little hurt.

Editor's note: I wanted to start out by wishing all of you a Happy Holiday, and thank you for making 1991 the inaugural year of what I hope will be something big -- Three Count. The next issue will be 12 pages (to make amends for the six-page format of this one), and will feature results of Starrcade, the return of the letters page, Part II of the **Billy Graham** interview, information on the Inside Edition piece and much more. That issue, dated Dec. 31, will be mailed Jan. 6, so please be patient as I prepare for another semester of college. I am leaving to New Orleans on Dec. 26 for one week, and will be unable to work on the newsletter. I will be sending out the newsletters every Saturday from now until eternity beginning in mid-January, which is also the time the new page format should take effect. See y'all in two weeks.

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1 issues remaining